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RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHAE #0453 1361212  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
R 161212Z MAY 07  
FM AMEMBASSY ASMARA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 8859  
INFO RUEHPH/CDC ATLANTA  
RUEPADJ/CJTF-HOA J2X CAMP LEMONIER DJ  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC  
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC  
RUMICEA/USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL

UNCLAS ASMARA 000453

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR G/AIAG, AF/EX, AND DS/IP/AF  
USAID/W FOR AFR/SD, BGH/AI, AFR/ESA  
CJTF-HOA FOR POLAD

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KFLU](#) [TBIO](#) [AMED](#) [EAID](#) [EAGR](#) [SENV](#) [ER](#)

SUBJECT: AVIAN INFLUENZA UPDATE FOR ERITREA

REF: A) State 50510, B) 06 Asmara 077, C) 05 Asmara 1105

¶1. As reported in ref C, the Government of the State of Eritrea (GSE) has extremely limited resources to battle an outbreak of human-to-human highly pathogenic influenza. The country's weak infrastructure and resource shortages raise serious questions about the GSE's ability to respond to even a limited outbreak. Despite the limitations, the GSE takes the threat of Avian flu seriously and has enlarged the National Task Force for Avian Flu to include the Ministry of Information in order to facilitate widespread and rapid media communication regarding preventive measures and emergency instructions in the case of an outbreak.

¶2. A senior Eritrean health official explained that an estimated four billion birds annually migrate through Eritrea in the "flyway" between east Africa and west Asia, eastern Europe, and the Mediterranean. Since Eritrea has no intensive poultry farming, these migrating birds present the most likely vector for the introduction of highly pathogenic influenza subtype H5N1. As a result, the National Task Force on Avian Flu concentrates its resources on planned surveillance and rapid response testing in the case of unexplained bird deaths. In the past year through two rounds of surveillance, blood tests were performed on 400 domestic and 600 migrating birds. Cases of low pathogenic influenza were in evidence, but to date, they have seen no cases of highly pathogenic influenza.

¶3. While other ministries and government agencies have lost vehicles and fuel allocations as the economy continues to plummet, the Task Force is currently supplied with the resources and the authority to travel wherever and whenever they need in order to implement planned surveillance measures and emergency response in the case of reported bird deaths. In one case, the Eritrean navy consumed scarce fuel to deliver animal health experts to the Dahlak Islands in the Red Sea off the coast of Masawa within the critical 24-hour period to test migratory birds that had died in large numbers. In addition, Task Force veterinarians reportedly have been granted access to fuel and vehicles in all six Zobas (regions) and, despite serious resource constraints nationally, the Task Force was allowed to include the distant Gash Barka region and Assab port in its two planned surveillance rounds. Overall, the Task Force reports good cooperation on notification and testing throughout the country, even at the sub-regional level.

¶4. Despite a previous reluctance to obtain outside funding (reftel C) the GSE is currently augmenting avian flu operations with funds from a variety of outside donors, including protective gear from the Food and Agricultural Organization and an \$800,000 grant from the

European Union. UNICEF is assisting with the development of a "communications strategy," and the World Bank is expected to fund contingency planning assistance.

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